

B Bernardo Cavallino of Naples, 1616-1656

September 14, 1984

The Cleveland Museum of Art
November 14 - December 30, 1984
The Kimbell Art Museum
Fort Worth, Texas
January 26 - March 24, 1985
Museo Pignatelli Cortes, Naples
April 24 - June 26, 1985

BERNARDO CAVALLINO OF NAPLES, 1616-1656
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The exhibition Bernardo Cavallino of Naples, 1616-1656, is the first devoted to this painter rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century, three centuries after his birth. It opens at The Cleveland Museum of Art on November 14, 1984, and closes December 30, 1984, then moves to the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, and the Palazzo Pignatelli Cortes of the Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples. The exhibition and its comprehensive catalogue attempt to establish the sequence of Cavallino's paintings and to make correct attributions for each painting. The catalogue serves not only the exhibition but also as a catalogue raisonné, the first comprehensive record of works by Cavallino.

More than forty paintings, about half of Cavallino's known works, will be assembled for the exhibition, enabling scholars and connoisseurs for the first time to compare the paintings attributed to him and to suggest a chronology of his style and subjects. Approximately a dozen of the works in the exhibition have surfaced on the market or have been identified in museum storerooms within the last decade; some have never before been published. Because his paintings were widely scattered and many, probably early on, misattributed, as yet unknown paintings may emerge after this pioneering exhibition to alter further our understanding of Cavallino.

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This is nearly all that is known about Bernardo Cavallino: that he was born in Naples in 1616 and very likely died there, probably during the plague of 1656,

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and in that brief career produced at least eighty paintings, only eight of which are signed or initialed. These works demonstrate that Bernardo Cavallino was a poet among painters, one of the most gifted and distinctive artists of his time and place.

Naples was the largest and most commercially active city in Southern Europe during the first half of the seventeenth century, but it was ruled by viceroys of the Spanish Hapsburgs and therefore subordinate to outside political and artistic forces. Although Naples had a university dating back to 1224 and numerous learned societies, it had in Cavallino's lifetime no academy of painting and few important local collectors. Seventeenth-century Neapolitan painters had no contemporary biographer to record personal anecdotes and recollections insuring their fame. The plague of 1656, which killed half the city's population, did much to break the continuity of oral traditions passed down in artists' workshops. For all these reasons, Naples's painters were not well or widely known during their active years and were little understood in later centuries.

Cavallino is one of the most intriguing of these Neapolitan painters. He specialized in cabinet-pictures, easel paintings, and devotional pictures principally for private chapels and collections, a kind of art for which documents rarely survive. Most of Cavallino's paintings were relatively small (1 by 1½ meters or less) and easily transported, and many were probably sold outside Naples, perhaps under the names of other artists. Paintings that remained in Naples, mostly in private collections, were not readily available to visitors, even to authors of guidebooks, and therefore rarely entered the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. His paintings--most on canvas, a few on copper--featured subjects drawn from the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian Testament, the Apocrypha, Church martyrologies, Ovid, Tasso, Roman history and mythology.

The only early attempt to record Cavallino's artistic personality is found in the gossipy Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed. architetti napoletani, by Bernardo

de Dominici (1683-1759), published in 1742-43. De Dominici described Cavallino's painting manner as "at the same time tender, gentle, and delicate . . . that it is grave and robust, showing great technical skill in contrasting light with shade and a dramatic striking of brightness against shadow," an observation similar to modern scholarly characterizations of Cavallino's style. Scattered notes and occasional lists of paintings or painters are almost the only references to Cavallino until, in the first quarter of the twentieth century, he was "rediscovered." After Aldo de Rinaldis's first small monograph in 1909, the situation of the previous centuries was reversed; where earlier Cavallino's paintings were often presented under other artists' names, in the enthusiasm for his rediscovery many pictures by others were attributed to him. The lists have been revised several times in the nearly 75 years since.

What can now be ascertained, or presumed with educated guesswork, about Cavallino is:

- that he was trained, probably by Massimo Stanzione, in the academic tradition which emphasized figure drawing, architecture, perspective, and a solid knowledge of literary sources;
- that his early style was influenced by the naturalism of his contemporary, the Spanish-born Neapolitan painter, Jusepe de Ribera;
- that the art of Rubens and van Dyck and certain Netherlandish mannerist printmakers encouraged the painterly elegance he was developing at mid-career;
- that his mature style mingles many sources in a distinctive manner that is unique for its lyricism, theatricality, and subtle color and light, foreshadowing the delicacy of eighteenth-century rococo.

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Beyond this bare outline, the challenge to define Cavallino's work remains. About a dozen pictures can reasonably be isolated as his earlier works and another ten or so clearly fall toward the end of his life, but it is so far impossible to coax the remaining sixty-plus paintings into a convincing chronological development.

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To establish a chronology is one of the goals of the exhibition and of its catalogue. The catalogue contains full entries based on current scholarship on each painting firmly attributed to Cavallino, as well as on some problematic works, and a complete, annotated inventory of paintings associated over the centuries with Cavallino's name that are now lost or no longer considered his. Contributing to the catalogue are Nicola Spinosa, Soprintendente Reggente, Museo e Gallerie Nazionali di Capodimonte, Naples; Giuseppe Galossa, president of the Neapolitan Society of Italian History; Ann Percy, curator of drawings at The Philadelphia Museum of Art; and Ann Tzeutschler Lurie, curator of paintings at The Cleveland Museum of Art. They are among the scholars devoting themselves to the study of seventeenth-century Neapolitan life and art. Several exhibitions, most recently *Painting in Naples 1606-1675*, have called attention to the city as an extraordinarily energetic center for creative endeavors during that period, and this exhibition is the latest in the chain of scholarship.

One of the pioneers in the study of the work of Cavallino and one of the initiators of this exhibition, Dr. Raffaello Causa was Superintendent of Capodimonte in Naples until his sudden death in April, 1984; the exhibition is dedicated to him. Chief among the lenders is Capodimonte, whose collection of Cavallino's paintings is unparalleled. Other loans come from Australia, Austria, Canada, England, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States.

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A supporting exhibition, Baroque Imagery, will be on view at The Cleveland Museum of Art, opening November 6, 1984. It is organized by John Schloder, assistant curator in the Museum's Department of Art History and Education, who has written its accompanying catalogue. Among many educational activities scheduled to accompany the Cavallino exhibition--films, lectures, and musical performances--the most significant for the scholarly world is an international symposium on Cavallino's paintings scheduled for November 16 and 17, 1984, at The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Support for the exhibition comes from the National Endowment for the Arts and an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities. The Cleveland showing is assisted by a grant from the Ohio Arts Council.

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For additional information, photographs, color slides, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.